I.

VALEDICTION IN THE MANNER OF THE SWAN GOD, CYGANTHESEUS

You changed my life, you
asshole. Hope you're happy. Hope
the birds don't drop a turtle on your head
like Cicero, the chick-pea nose, parlando?
Wee brown flower, would I be the bee,
buzzbuzz, homunculus,
why'd'ya bite my petey, baby?
Petey's peeved and bleeding.
Remember how you took me to your bedroom
to show me how you got your laptop pierced?
Dust my muffler, cowboy,
combine. Moustache,
bend me over while you bang
the whizkid with his protractor in
the bennu bird.

DURANTE & ISCARIOT

Autumn shrinks the air as the daylight weans the leaves.
A mother in her shorts and sweatshirt tugs her child
intent upon her little baggie full of crisp and colored fish,
and I cringe, imagining the old man built in him
scattering broken glass among my ashes. Sorry fall

of a year too much with rain. I missed the sun,
I missed the long days turning purple in the green,
and the green just one more shade of gray among the wings
of the pigeons in their jeweled hoods, and the faded
chocolate and vanilla of their albino brothers. Ice

will swell the river and the lake, ice will steady
the rivers run, and hurt me endlessly. I hear it coming
in my knee, I see it coming in the moon, its dust
a mirror to the hidden sun, the sun I missed. So I
will put on a play, a little puppet show

against a faded crimson curtain with a gold tassel fringe,
one hand a song and dance man in a too-tight tux, bowing
to the audience like river reeds. He must be very quick
to keep their eyes on him, he must be borne
on the ridicule to his statements and his dead love's ukulele--

he sings a silly song, he does the dance of marionettes,
bobbing and weaving, pugilists hung on twine. And while he swings
there, swings on nothing but the moonlight through the eaves,
another play is at its dénouement, a man already dead
with a rope in one hand and in the other just a purse

of lambskin filled with silver coins. Why
would he take such currency if he had to die? Perhaps
he is not the puppet that we thought we knew. A greedy thug
with ugly hands, a face contorted like a broken bowl. Perhaps
his great betrayal was a secret pact, whispered agreement

with the beloved so betrayed? Perhaps a million things.
Perhaps the scarlet in the leaves will bring me peace this year,
or the cold won't carve me open like a harvest's gourd.
One hand sweeps the rafters with my merriment,
the other touches the lips of a miraculous but silent Lord--

the heaven of every puppet is a hand, and its hell

a clutch of wide-eyed, astonished, giggling faces.
The moon faced man waits in the dark
among the dusty curtains, waiting for the spotlight.
The audience is hushed, the phones are all on vibrate
and the programs rustle like the maddening
plumes of the peak. The spotlight swings,
and the man is red in the second that it takes
the room of eyes to adjust to see his black
suit with plaid patches at the elbow, sewn
from flannel pajamas. And then,

he pulls his body inside out, his cane lain
on the clean stage floor, and the young man
with the black mane of his hair
and injured eyes stands still
at a lonesome black trunk with a limb
on which a rope of braided hemp
swings. "I am neither yes nor no,
the ghost of a star or a winged angel.
It is my life to place my head
into the great light circuit and to have you

brought to tears. Tears for you.
I am neither moon nor morning star,
inferno or glacier, dumb as a bug.
I never knew a Mrs. Calabash, or
knew these men, surrounding me now
with spears and pocket change. Durante comes out,
and slips from his skin to be the cursed
Judas, hanging and hanging myself
when we're as dead as this. This burnt out tree
rolled out on wheels, held steady by the stagehands
you cannot see. Light: go blue

and watch me as I throw the rope
until it catches and I tie the loose end
on this rusty nail. Imagine it in your head,
slowly hammered there. I look around, lost, for something
to stand on. A block of ice? A thin
wood box who slats will splinter into my feet,
who needs feet with death so close at hand?
A stump rolls out on tracks and stunned
by the inevitable, I look out for a word of protest,
some sort of cry for mercy, but there is none.
I climb onto the trunk. I slip the noose

around my neck. The stage hands
pull the trunk away. I feel the choke, the lungs
deflating and the moon
bright as a spotlight through the skylight.

Why must I suffer this way each night?
Is my suffering worth money, too? Twitching and crying
I hear the shouts, the applause, and I am gone.

The traitor and the moon-faced man are one.
Endlessly tightening this loop of string
in the brightening and dimming
play in your behalf. Your turn.

DRIVE-IN/1976

Sunset: rings grew around the moon, full pumpkin,
promising rain. That circle sawed off to where the frightened woman
in the middle of it gazes up
to watch what we are doing up on earth. By whitewashed bricks
we scurry in pajamas through grass wet through our slippers.
Dusk: gritty pink in green clouds rising, car horns,
wheels on gravel, grass burning into motion. Musk of butter, pizza, French fries,
marijuana in gusts. Cricket leg on leg is starlight

snoring, dark escaping. My brother: sturdy, hurrying in circles,
pushing behind me as I push, our hands
gripping the metallic disk on which my sisters
and the others sit, squealing. Hair flies back behind them,
the speed created takes them from our hands—goodbye—
and we fall back as they spin. A voice explodes
above us—coming in—in waves of certainty—
echoing against the face of the bow-tied man, forty feet

of gabardine, the candy circus pouring
from boxes bigger than our house, than the moon
that pulls the dark up with it. When I turn toward the cars, my voice
rises an octave as the schoolroom of the vehicles
spreads, row on row of hulls, echo of the cat-like bass, Mancini-made
Pink Panther creeping the purple of my father standing
in the spit of sand beyond the playground’s grass—
airplane spinning a pink filament, cheer of summer

stadiums rising—and we run to him.

NAKED MAN AS DESCENDANT OF THE RABBIT MAGISTRATE

When I was the rabbit magistrate, I would regulate the law:
thumping on the mountain, roads shook out from their dust.
I was prospector of highways. The high cedars shrunk

in the hot light that came to me in blue robes
and prayed about my fat, furred body as the dark,
dressed as the dark, proved fitting witness to the moon.

The tubers in the mill, within me, the sprockets of the train,
the low visceral witness of the madames as they rolled
out from the shrubbery and picked their teeth

with August grass…all moved in tandem for my satisfaction.
even the grunting of the politicians as they yanked
their cleats on behind the nets subdued themselves to me. But

I am transformed. Below, the squirrels grew listless,
knocked acorns back and forth between them and the madames
sipped their slushies, leaning back to shade their eyes

with hands hung fat with rings. I heard the doorbells blink
the entrances of children as the school-year purred into hoses,
set loose, snakely and berserk, above the hot green lawns. I heard

the workers in the carnival kitchen jump back
from splattered fat to laugh while pink meat sizzled gray
and spat in batter. I saw my life steal from me: I barely touched

its edges as it slipped off, and I stood a naked man
concerned with none of it. Let the hammer hurt the anvil
and the great beasts feed upon their young. Let the pink

shrimps crinkle in their skins for fright
before the huge squid’s pointy beak: eat, eat. I want only
his pale, thin body and his lips open to mine,

to brush my fingers on his lips to read his breath. Or die,
a man, silent in cacophony and bleeding from my gums
while America swoons for the sorrow of vertical birds.

BLUE JAY SEDUCES EARLY FROST

Autumn, I am waiting. I have traveled in disguise:
men, vapors, swirling particles of dust. Moonlight
took me without rancor. I am a prism. I know
how the light bleeds as it is torn apart and flattened,
wings arcing up against the sun dial, making a mockery
of pumpkin, and the cornstalks hollow in its fall.
Fall forward in your dress of guesses—edges without surface
a hypothesis—who was morning when it compelled you to be free

then soldered you to everything? Indeed,
I cannot ask you to be convinced, to be solidified
as matter. I cannot bring you love. I can barely
hold my wings above my head to cry out
in my claw's voice and lift above that screech,
my throat is choked with brambles. I cannot terrify
the river into mirrors, the strewn leaves into duff—
I am first whistle, hunter, paramour and son,

convinced that I am cruel. I did nothing
when the bald fox ate my babies. My plea:
change when I am nothing. Tell me something now,
I want to know. I do. How will you feel
when you snake into me, squeezing me
into a walnut, hard and dry?

THE FISHERMAN

Beneath my hood of mesh
eyes spark from its flanks, grit
on flint, surrounded by it—I want to kill him

with a trick, not the bunching of a fist
or rabid bat. See what the gulls do
as they wrench his slack jaw, he is all head,

fins, taffeta and glitter. Greyhound, isosceles on haunches,
lapping out the eyes. The sea green where the air dies
at its edges. Darkness falls, moonlight spills

the fish throat onto deck slick with seaweed, throbbing shrimp.
Quick, I flick the blade against the gills, along its gut. Goodbye,
glitter-guts, goodbye. I am a hurricane

dropping tornadoes from my legs,
need the pretense of surprise. We share the wind,
ocean it can’t breathe; something sharp

squirming in my fist, the nets are flat.
I hold its entrails up above my head and the wind blows,
pulling dripping silver to my face. My wide mouth, eyes

blinking open in the spill. Spray on the blade of boat. A crack
of white light from a cloud, black
harbor gut and rot, ghosts of drowned men sucked from it.

THE SANDMAN

He fools us as we fall asleep. He combs
his white hair straight, tossed around his head
to hang against his shoulder. Smoke burrowing
into the moonlit lips of the pockets of his coat,
filled with metal combs and ivory, wizened cheeks

bold with holes that catch projectile wind—
skips past glass and nightlight, painted elf whose belly blooms,
star, lit speckled orange from within. Tonight,
we'll change. We'll hold our hands over our mouths so that the tiny spiders can't crawl in,
we'll stare rings of stucco on the speckled plaster, moons or cluster galaxies —

doors swing, vacuum opening on shadows filling up the sleeves of folded coats, crayon diagrams of birds in the box with the broken
soldiers and the spring, a sponge shaped like an hour glass, hard as a hunch —
on my side, I clear my throat and squint, at collapsing comedians on the screen,
The Muscled Yeoman of Democracy—secret eaters of "the blue corn

that made the Aztecs strong": Delta Girl, create
silt from oxygen to spray against your foes. Tada!
Energy Boy and his trusty sidekick, Mr. Splash! Duck Girl,
slide into the sentient, voracious
Whirlpool of Thriss, and do battle unto death with Gross Golargo,

Fiend of Spee, and triumphant with your cast-iron eggs intact
retire for the summer with the sewer dwelling demi-gods
beyond the door of sad Andromeda—we killed the punk
who fucked our Aztecs up the ass. I kicked his hand from mine, I bit his side to suck out his
stinking spleen and with a dashing uppercut and lightning bolt of ectoplasm

mixed with crackling anti-matter stunned him, bent him over my left knee

and munched his spine in half. Keeripes! The bankers leaping from skyscrapers
like blackbirds shot out of the sky, how can they stand it, how can they stay awake, layered there like cookies on our bunk-beds, half asleep and sailing slowly from the light, the light on light of windows traveling the wall,

four rectangles swimming, flat on flat, bending at the corner, on the edge, then flying flat again, the car has stopped, or moved on out of earshot, sight —
my brother snores, my hand on his hand growing cold along the edges of my fingers.
I am going, gone. Murky confusion, dogs following, a tower crumbling
in light, climbing, falling, broken, blown—did not know when to say goodnight,

gone. His fingers slip from the fractals of my fingers.

THINGS TO BE SHATTERED IN OCTOBER

The raspberries are green
because the wind has tapped the color in the cells,
kills them. We are lifted by the wind into the trees.

A sundial or a creeper draping the pond—a child's windmill,
creaking as the pinwheel ticks and shutters
its own shadow on the peeling sheen—

the crimson flicked into the wind in strips,
and the sunlight on its wings pull the tower of it
up, foundation, all of it, the wind and what it carries—

up after fences casting nets of shadow, the dark ones
in the grass, fine white powder holds close to the wood—
up, and up, blue taking them to violet then black,

stars steadfast, innumerable, to where—
I stand laughing, arrogant, unkind. My long lashes lick the flurry,
where have we gone? Our sister in the meadow

with her hand raised to the ducks, the blue jewels
of their wings unkempt, and what will marry her?
In the petting zoo, the goats have knocking knees and bicker
over cans.
We are loved by dogs like this, thirsty for our salt.

DEMONS MUNCHING RICE DANCE FOR GRAINS OF SALT

I.

No one’s knight, I carry this to you with burning hands:
this is the stolen book. It crawls out of the mirrored crab
of Mnemosyne. Goodbye, the gingham waif. The dog-eyed boy
in goblin boots. The white mare and the hard white grains.
Fill the dance floor with debris and build the man
to man. A scattering of motor oil that leaves tallow circles

in the paper, windows light shines through.
I hear the Abenaki ticking flint above a dire wolf's track. So,
the barn-dance will begin. Goodbye. By gum, with bales of hay
piled on the cedar benches and the windows, stapled over
with thick sheets of tattered cellophane. Pinewood boards
spray painted over with the scarlet number of the anti-Christ. I see

the trapper lick his cut thumb, smear it on a raccoon’s skull
to mark his souvenir. Its black eyes slid like blanched skins
of a stewed plum under his thumbs, into his hands,
smelling of copper, iron, meat, but he smells
the river surging one mile up the cedar forest
to the European sea. The girls in plaid skirts bend, the witness

in tank-top squats. They spin their heels and slap
their knees, let out one monotonous shout, in unison. The barn dance
has begun. The fiddler chaws a straw and drags a bow

across the catgut strings. Sometimes, the skinheads hum,
whistling in the hallways where high ceilings swipe
their voices, a cacophony of birdhouses above their heads.

The speckled walls are throbbing with the innuendo of my name.
The wordless anthem thrums. The heavy-lidded sous-chef bleeds.
His teeth: loose in their gums. Weed and Genessee. Or PCP.

II.

Green-eyed gamin, her bare foot nail-first on the floor.
Farewell, bright lady fair, farewell. Farewell to bat and hound.
The loser rises in his cloak of keys. The secret chord is shown. Fall back,
boyish murderer, your pleasantries are meaningless. Your school-boy
slate of history in white chalk on black slate. My shroud. Your bald head's
blown.

III.

I love the missing link. The weakest lie is light. The arrow cutter
combs the brush for missing beads, the periwinkle pin. The polecat
molar shines among the mica and the rose quartz of the upper bank.
The thin boys spank their knees. The blank-eyed hand a sawbuck
to the queer they'll kill. The child aimed at me. The purple rabbit
and the nylon bird. Or radium. Hair combed with a baseball bat.

IV.

The lady of the river keeps her secrets in a hummingbird
that clenches like a pin. There is a sweet she wants,
it glitters in the bowl of walnuts, pink and black. It's not
enough to reach in just to pry the candy out, it's more
she hates the nuts. Those strong shells nothing tears. Above,
she whiffs the fish breath of the old bag tug at the curtains
from their rods. Her cod was uncooked once. Its bones
were clean, in place. Air overtook water, and the water
pulled its thin and clear green fins back like the wings of geese.

Beside the table, chairs. Beside the high chair, cat.
The cat is mewling, purring like the motors high above the whales,
gliding and colliding in the first and final blood, its paradise
of silver rings reaching from their centers. The way
the monkeys walk. The way they swing and fuck. Her sloth-like
nostrils quiver in the glass above the kitchen sink. Her pouch
is full of pups. Her claws are in the light. One eyebrow arches up.

V.

The blond waitress and her scarab's chain of gentlemen.
Fruit-flies dying in the whisky glass beneath a cheese-cloth
and a rubber band. The crowd is black-eyed. Scared. The dumpsters
feed us in the public park. Spitting priests
and punks. Cigarette butts blossom in rain-puddles. Along

the strand, the gram of lost book burdens brothers. Breaks. Becomes.
Slugs longer than my feet glisten on the barrels in the rain.

VI.

I read the life I had. I held the cup I held. I traced the gilded edge. I touched
my looking glass. I burned my finger on the match-book
where his number blurred. The saint of castanets, a doctor
in his mountain house. The sniffling DJ who let fall his hand
onto my knee beneath a movie screen while Baby Kerouac watched,
as if protecting us. The print-maker. The photographers. The hip-hop
florist and his twin. The ski pro, singer and the poet monk. Vice,
his lazy eye more beautiful than sure. My hand
on fire now. Finger after finger smokes. Goodbye. I smell
your cities burn. It only takes one flaw to bend
the web until its snaps. Flies drop everywhere. Spider's trapped.
Clenched between two mountain range it bends, ignites and blows away...

VIII.

No one's knight, I climb out on the roof and lay the fine blade
down. I watch the olive grove, America, dried brown and blown bone dry
above the ancient beds of coral seas, and then I close
his eyelids with my lips, left, then right. I share
my sight with him. He carries words for me. He blinks
and touches me. This is the stolen book. I'll ask for nothing
back. We watch as one by one the thousand stars crack out. God
bless the aching back. Water in the gasoline. Jesus
and percocet. He flicks the daddy-longlegs from my collar. Then: he fathers
me.

IX.

To stand in anger, and in love through rage, to turn away.
Terrified to see the leaf pulled underwater, then to slide
through murk and delta, falling. The water logged pond-skipper
of my granted kiss to you. Do what you will to save me,
I will save you: the bitter Punch & Pancho show
played out in argyles' shadows on our bedroom wall.

The hound that wouldn't harm us if we dared not speak.
A tarnished penny, and the thin red ribbon, cellophane,
from a pack of cigarettes surrounded by a full moon's spokes, in rainwater,
and the rainbow slick. It is only that everything I have been
given has no meaning seen through you. Stereopticon,
Cyclops, maelstrom of eyesight pulling as our hot tongues

twist. Winter jettisons its daggers, drags the crystals
of your step. The skin-thin jetty of veined-ice
pulsing underfoot toward the mailbox. Frisk and titter of the blue jay
bickering, the clear day's dust of snow. Icicles
draping coffins, chimes, into the hemlock rows. I
had to tear the taproots out by digging wide

and profound holes. Find you in everything: the horse
glue mint of stamps, licked and pressed on envelopes,
upside down, the soldier’s code. Your arms musk, heavy in the empty

wings of shirts I can barely bear the washing of. I am
Durante and Iscariot, houseguest spy within the Inns of Calabash.
It's Love: picking through the bins to find the last two sorts you like.
lime jellies and the, then--what sane man shops like this? Begin
with trays of water cress and celery, periodically sprayed, and so
on through the fruits and vegetables, the nuts and roots.

The deli, lobster-tank, and butcher where the Neo-Nazi punks,
in whites, dismember the dismembered counties of the roan cow.
What soup, my warrior? Which condiments? Which soap? Muzak
tinkles in the air vents blowing on my head. I am breathless
for your breath, by the time I gain the last aisle, wheel my carriage through
the nurseries of bread. My pulse and breath in you. Poem: be him.
The buzzing summer gnawing at his body like a bread.

EXEUNT

I.

I cannot beat my face against the sea
to bleed for sharks. Only you. The moon
won’t hold me. Mouth brush mine. I hold
my coat now for your arms. To be

scattered in the wind and shook to fear
the rain. To be stitched into the linen
meant to cover one. To lay down upon the cloth,
a body’s shadow surely would reveal itself

but wash out with hot water
and a pinch of soap. Shroud into sail. Poem,
hold me. Only you. The streets are garrulous
with men, glittering slings

of beaten gem, slack mouths funnels. In dark,
they kill things at the carnival. There surely
is one knife that doesn’t know me. Your wide arms like the law,

arbitrary and invisible, the keeper

of the clean. Your broad hands
the one anthology, strict to probe and pulse.
This mouth. Tongue and finger. Four wrists
pressing palms against a kiss. It is late.

The gulls go and they wash the streets
of scavengers, the black dog with the bone,
flesh, the fissure. Static in its fur. The moon
locks in the cedars, illumines the sailor

sleeping on the rocks in the pale arms
of the cabin boy. The great sea swept of salt. I
am nothing, never, born to breed
with reams. Three years beaten

to be beaten. Only you. If you were not,
why did I come here, to be buried? The wind
in hells of rain. The sleeper purring
at the dagger. If you were not, at last, my skin,

the bones they hold together, book, unbind me.

II.

It's said that things got big so quick
because the laws of matter, laws of time
do not, indeed, apply to space itself. I don't know
about you, but you've got me when it comes down to what
exactly space is if it isn't stuff, or not. OK—
the universe is flat, it says so in the news, perhaps
there's one, perhaps an infinite amount
of them, laid flat, one atop another like the pages
of a script, or if somebody's right, we have it all,
sort of, to ourselves, except there's holes to slip from here
to there, or maybe if it all is one
it only seems a disc from here and really,
in it vastness, is twisted like an animal balloon, or…
but I can't taste one moment's peace. The stars might just
as well be pins, my skin a tent beneath which students

mill and squabble, where canvasses of birds
in blur of flight know a vague and inexact illumination.
The blackbirds in the trees above me have
green metal in their feathers and the pale blue
irises of arctic dogs are flesh
reminiscent of ice as interrogation of the light.
my face bare to the sky. the clouds a feast of drying linen
in dying, spilled ozone scattered by lightning, and the aerosol

frivolities of long gone Americans who smelled sharp
thirty years ago. A year’s a wheel, a spin, a scoop. A bird’s

a serpent out of grass. A tent’s a tool
for homes to train their roofs with, comb or cap.
Flat. Spin, spin, spin! Flat, flat, I feel for us, but think
a flat like that is almost infinite in thickness and vast
as every knew, the news unknown—
why am I here? Where was my buddy
blown? Somebody somewhere. Snow. The wolf
that paws the sun and moon like balls of baking bees
and swallows both. Stars. Stars caked in his muzzle
clank like distant ships, and the sound settles,

III.

Milk and light and silver.
Money floods the house—a heart,
while in the purple grass the cows are groaning,
counting and comparing their five stomachs
as the wind stirs up the din and scrape
of cricket and the fireflies drift,
their bottoms green and bright. We tend

to think the lever is the Lord: fulcrum,
beam, the hefted earth. We tend
to fill our big mouths full of tongue, when
all along the teeth would be
precise and free, and what
wagged into battery
would be better bit clean.

IV.

The pigeons cannot be compared
to breath, nor are they
larks blown fat like jerking gray balloons,
bleary eyed with wishing for the light
that fell upon the lizards with their long necks
drifting in the moonlight, ferns
among ferns, only some fronds grinding
and grinding and slobbering and swallowing.
Dim birds. Drowsy birds, and fine.

II.

FELIX AS LOVE SLAVE 5-0-9

It was with the sharp edge Felix freed his hand,
and with the dull edge of the knife he scraped the blood free
of his skin. The braid-cast where the rope ate. Dogs
with long tongues that they wag dry in the blast,

glimmering in black like pearl, the rain
awaiting falling, freaking static shows. Felix, like the dog
born betrayed by bloody flesh, likes to gnaw
revenge. Like the lizard, born from desert eggs,

leftover saurs that missed (at some offshoot)
the glory of the avian. Fifteen days in dark, his face
pushed down to suck warm spit. Grit and turpentine.

His anus hot it must be love. Conundrum

of the master’s mouth: said he’d split
him up the middle, slap the wisecrack clean.
Pincers on his nipples in the dungeon rack. Felix,
filled with wisdom, teased loads of jism

bursting in him. Harvest held by reaper. Balls ache, tapped
by straps and pinched, hairs pulled, probed with finger, fingers, fist.
Would die. His head limp and his beard a burn in lash
streaks on his neck. Face grabbed: enormous hand,

he held Lix, thumb under chin, clenched like fruit
to be snapped from stalk. The parted mouth too weak to stop
the hard tongue, teeth invading. Forgot the game. Forgot
who tied the blindfold. Escape. September sun a punch.

THE ANT LIEUTENANT TELLS ME OF HIS RETURN

Black soil collapsing onto rock.
Beetles with shining blue backs humming over the water
chilled with rain. Pike angling in the chambers of the dank,
waiting for the naked in the rainfall, stripped clean, gutted, redrawn
from memory by a blind boy against the stiff legs of the herons. Mothers

huddled in stone kitchens, dropping fish, egging the molecules of the water
into frenzy from the pot’s hot walls. Skin, scratched through, dangling
into a snowflake of dolomite sinking slowly in the mossy brink.
My fingerprints are flying toward my eyes, too quick
for me to blink. My hand arcing over colorless glass, finger wet

against the rim: the cylinder caught in the motion of the fingertip, hum—
glass shifting into another pitch. Had been petals in a cut glass bowl,
what’s beautiful is dirt. I want oil, hands rough against my cheek,

go. Leave me here dripping,
horse gnawing at the scarecrow’s glove. I feel his face

becoming lips. His eyes close. I kiss the lids. Rich boy
whizzing with his back against the car door, dribbling his Bermudas
as I shake it dry. My hand tugs at a button. Hush. Sunspots
make lenses jump. The old can't see us, argue about what we should be doing
with our bodies, the broken barking in the damps. Moonlight on fungi,
frightening the girl

with the dead child hidden in the tree. The nurseries of babies she will bake.
The kid who wanted the big popsicle. Could not have. The sea
beneath the night sky green with heat, claws
filling with the chilly water, with pods of kelp
and crabs the size of dimes—I stick my finger behind the buckle

of the drunk boy to forget. The wind is filled with turtle,
shadows getting longer as they pour across the stained wood from the light bulb.
Steelworkers shirking the pulleys to polish their fishing poles. The peepshow —
it’s a bird, a hawk, a beaked man with a book. Buck up, cubby!
Wipe your nose and take a number.

Cinder at the snuffed wick—thin lips pulling back from having blown.
Grit and flurry. I have only tropes to touch you with, it hurts
to stand or sit upright. I lie above this city (San Francisco)—did I come to die
in this imaginary life? Eyelids bleeding and weeping,
looking for me. Opened to vision. Closed.

HITCHHIKER DISGUISED AS A CRYSTAL THE WHALE CRIED

I will call the whale Eibreen, lean into her eyelid just to sleep
below her huge black iris, spinning in its socket, twitching
with sorrow, sea. And she will grunt and chime, and dive, and I
will be secluded in the sheathes of her divining jaw,
chart mountains all around us as the shrimp
sail on, sharks swerve with the hubris of the tooth-skinned

and the cartilaginous quick. Eibreen, in Africa, there’s bones like you
jutting out of desert sand, Sahara once sea-bed (where the hippo
-like beast your family was) was sunburn and fly-sting (slipped

back into blood-warm water). Was it flipper-like
and fine, your early arms, was it that deep? Or did they
merely traipse the purple ferns of doomed peninsulas,
where shallow waters bloomed with blue translucent pods

and Eurypterids like mattresses crooked their claws and snapped for fish?
Were they, Eibreen, just flirting to snatch for food, and then began
their paddle for pineapples on the other banks? Didn't paddle,
swooped. Didn't sink, but only came to be dehydrated
a moment at the surface, blue air bellowed in
kept in adenoidal flaps. A treat for freaks, long friend,
lull and coo, surrounding everything from under in its rings
of sound and light. Here in your eye, Eibreen, muons falling through us,
x-rays, radio and snow, spectrum and drum, gravity not quick, but nearly
simultaneous.

THE HILL IS A GONDOLA AS I WATCH THE SNOW FALLING

Not expanding, but escaping. Not flowering, but shining, a refraction
in a diamond, human, blind facets. Disbeliever of the sunbeam. Self.
The marrow opens inward from the eyes. The eyelids of the eland
opening and closing, scattered and watchful, on the tracks.
Digging in my wrists. Blood rushing—wreck blown open
like the milkweed, if the milkweed caged the wind.

FLAUTIST ON THE NILE

Tones are holes. I hold them to the stops.
My fingers cold but creep

to keep them in the tube. My breath
a mouth my mouth must have

completely in its kiss. My throat

a bone of air and xylophone

my voice inside a boy, a mallet
cracking me in pattern. Slow

the dying reed and river, hold
the delta, silt, silt replica

of stars undoing mountain,
swirling into this, the lowland

where the flute falls sideways
and he takes me

with a tongue I hope
is long and sharp.

KISSING BEARDED MEN

Turbulence of karakuls, the windlass pin, and fire
saber after saber, the buttons stab Bluebeard’s bed with lightning
and his body: storm. So my jaw hounds fireworks for a fox—heart stabbed
by supernova devours him again: the bass drum, the dawn, face
and face ragged with tongues, wag and quack inanely in the muck.
I ride him as far as I am able, then he devours me, dressed in robes

of breathing meat heavy on bones. Octopus with throbbing body
dives for pearls, jealous of my bones. The lion eats from one end, he the
other.

A DOOR IS A TRUSTY WITNESS

A doorway holds, within its gravity, the constants and inconstancy
of house: the bedposts and the linens of the separate beds, the carpets
and the carpenters who nail unfinished floors from boards of plywood
carried over shoulder and leaned on upright boards. Linoleum

and the box' human continuum, who have paid to age here
and will come to sag beneath the profundity of debt, its toll
upon their time. The doorway fills with door, then empties out of wood

with a bad wolf's huff and puff. Its hinges have no memory
of the fingers of the mailman or the housecat's fat ass flourished
with its hunter's tail. They cannot feel the cat, encumbered
by complacency and milk becoming rigid beneath fur that lifts off
from its flesh as if electrified—as fur-ball burns off to leave predator
animated, hungry and alert. They cannot judge the taut jaw opening

to slit the cute puff open with the quill-thin fangs, warn the satisfied
away with its cargo of guts and hoppity-hop slop dangling from its maw
as it darts, bloody-whiskered, through the swinging doggy-door. The door
did not care that it was compromised by that flap of rubber. The door
did not wince to have its edges scored and screwed, metal plates attached

three places up one side, and opposite, gored by an iron peg and latch. The cat is free
to drag its mess, the cuneiform and wavelength of its footprints,
the drag spelled out in blood. We could ask a hundred questions, it would still
be wood. The hinges are hoops of metal slick with grease. They do not give
two whistles why we come or go. At most, we offer them the poke and jiggle
of a key, perfunctory and quick, the entrance of a tiny metal thing, a little jagged,
held narcissistically--we pull out when we get what we want: rabbit on the sidewalk
with its brown eyes on fire with the headlights of an approaching car.

PIGEONS

The power-lines are full of innuendoes:
spindles, archaeopteryx, lacewing and cicada-rattles keening in the oaks,
a million planes spinning
in their eyes. Pigeons, we can catch them,
the two of us, like ravenous Americans.

FOR I WILL CONSIDER MY SQUID, HUEY

For I will consider my squid, Huey.
For I can pour him into the pickle bucket to maintain moistness in summer.
For when I tickle him, he implodes.
For when I walk him, the hounds of the marketer howl with perdition.
For he rushes to press his pointy head against the crackling screen,
For he has a wicked crush on the green bundt-pan-shaped beauty in the Jell-O commercial.
For he is a colloid.
For he is liable to whistle when I wear my coonskin coat and wrap his tentacles around my ankles.
For he will light incense and play his Julie Newmarr albums.
For I can dip him in coconut evenly.
For he is fond of Yoohoo.
For when he is underwater his body is compact and hydrodynamic.
For when he is above sea-level he resembles a deflated scumbag.
For he is translucent.
For he is the zenith of evolution and the nadir of table manners.
For he is a little bit country, a little bit tock n' roll.
For he will never be vanquished by the outmoded custom of foot-binding.
For he is adherable to glossy flat surfaces.
For he is an inky pisspot.
For he may be blown by the wind east to west, west to north, and be covered in insects.
For he is the Hughmeister.
For he is never a square peg in a round hole.
For he would be very delicious with a little garlic and butter, quick like a minnow, inert like yogurt.
For he weeps in the holes of the ghosts of the kipper.
For he is of the rank of the creepy looking octopuses.
For he is both pickled and wiggly.
For he is cuddly like dumpling.
For he is always swiping my lipstick and my hairbrush.
For he is at his best when he is upside down, descending to the bottom.
For he is an avid reader of the new formalism.
For he has, like Mr. Loopner, no spine.
For he is most likely to succeed in business without really trying.
For he is the wishful cream-cheese thinker.
For he longs for the crisp shell of the late August lobster.
For he is reluctant to admire the baleen of the whale.
For he is admirable in all pursuits including dentistry.
For he is entirely immersed in philosophical pursuits like backgammon.
For he has studied beneath the enormous Preston Weegie.
For most certainly he has denounced the practice of acupuncture.
For he is defensive when he is anxious.
For he is comfortable in his squididity.
For he was a devotee of Mandelstam and Eisenhower.
For he noses through the forests of Burgundy, sniffing for truffles.
For he is lousy at touch football.

For he is never confused with the Ichneumon cuttlefish, were there one.
For we have been known to sip lager from slippers, and lounge giggling on fuzzy carpets French-braiding his tentacles.
For he admits himself to the motel under the moniker Wilma Zwyzyk.
For he is apparently the creator of the disposable squid.
For I am ashamed in the pink light of his undulating midsection.
For he is as squid does. For he is The Shit.
For he can squish.

III.

CONFESSIONS AT THE SANDBOX

So, of course we were hitting him, we had to.
When you are born, you are connected to your mother
by a rubber hose out of a belly button,
boys and girls together, so you see
when Billy shoved his ralph he expected us
to squeal, but my mother's in the circus
and I have driven her caboose a hundred times
at night, sitting on her lap. She almost burned

my elbow with a match that she threw
out the window, but the wind kicked it back
into the car and bounced off of my arm,
and Aimee said we had to beat on Billy
or we could get into hot water for watching
his soggy pecker poking through his zipper.
Here is my lunch box. See? See?
At night, I crumple up my cookie
where the pudding goes and hide
it here, under the wine and make a wish.

I hide my face inside the window, where the moon
is cool, on my eyelashes and lids.
Can you blink? O, but you are very brave
to hold that snake like that. One time I saw
a snake, yes. One time I saw a grasshopper, my brother
whacked it with his monkey wrench,
my brother is annoying, but whatever.
Watch. We're walking like a dog walks
with our butts—we call them keisters—
swinging behind us. Swing, OK? OK, swing.

AMBITIONS FOR THE FLEA CIRCUS

I.

The acrobats arc over townspeople gaping,
bent in the air like lopsided terns. The stink of the lions
drifts over, the summering prep girl at whose fingers
pink filaments of sugar spin a paper cone
into a nest small hands will light on.

The dramatic lion, clown-ruffled bear
have no memory of wild grass, the ant in the honey
dripping from octagonal sockets in burnt out trunks.
It is as if what seeds of the pumpkin feel
inside the jack-o'- lantern poised over heads

of the cabbage night vandal, and so we are:
standing in the fractal of our mirrored rooms,
made sane by accident, dressed cleanly
with our faces naked before thawing rings of sea—
gates closed, the shadows of the pageants over

at least in dropping fog tonight,
and there are no scripts from which to brag,
or weep, no mention whether we wave
our fingers flippantly at the moon or claw at sod.
We go about, completely awkward in these boy-scout skins.

II.

The midgets danced exactly as I asked them to,
if only they could have soft shoed on the curved cups
of my extended palms. The blood rich plush of velvet booties
padding snow-like on my lifelines. The small brass bells
jangling and bobbing near their earlobes, lady-slipper folds
jutting out from the spikes of duckling down. O sad

cold captain of the minuscule, I want to say
no one takes the motion of my earnest privates seriously.
The mimics are munching on their powder hungry
biscuits in the seal-car, squeaking as they roll
and giggle in their cups, between the striped beach balls
and hoops of tempered bronze. The seals

are sleeping, flippers laid out flat, with their
whiskered harelip faces peacefully
pressed against them. The bear is stuporous and dull
with honey in his cage, tapping his paws on the curve
of barrel rolled in to amuse him. I know

what it would be like to set free the tigers,

the great cats aligned with the scents of the night,
as their bones must remember the sentry on the hillock,
watching the rain roll like a wave across the dry grass
of the Savannah, and the full moon filling indigo
with minted silver light.

III.

His shirtsleeves rolled around his funny-bone,
bounced them as he winced
and jerked his arms back, chicken winged,
and laughed and groaned and laughed. The snare drum
called out like a huge frog
bulging in the marsh, and the frogs
called back, their clipped chirps
in counterpoint to cricket, and cricket
synchronized to firefly. Black pines
swayed like drunken pinheads in the dark
while methane crawled the water
in a clean green cloud of light.
He brought his palms down flat,
cushioned by budgies.
Memory shattered on the moon:
the children’s night-clothes growing green,
their footprints in the negative of his hand:
the smoking emerald light where
a few specks turned upon a wheel.

IV.

Why was it necessary, then, to enlist me
into your evenings? You did not encourage me
in my domestic duties concerning meals—
only the menial tasks which left you
irresponsible to companionship. And why

would you ask me of what I was thinking
when anything not of your mind was dangerous to you
and reason for dismissal? The last things
you wanted to know was that you were not
alone in your fantasy, that many

beautiful boys danced on that spasmodic drum,
exulting bodies at perfection and flirtation
with the tiny devils that enter our bodies
through ports of pleasure and the slits left
by toiletry. Yours is a modern concern

and a medieval preoccupation. No one
is following you down to the river, no one

considers you remarkable of agony,
we have all lost love and did not care the reasons:
what have I loved in emotion, I have despised

in intellect. Has this disastrous circus finally crashed
against its clown? The evidence of chickens
flapping fire-ward reckons so. Your inward voyages turned
corruptible cargoes onto clean-skinned islands
and your lurching murmur of a body whistled down.

THE POGROM

The wagons lurched through mud and hollyhock
torn by wind and scattered in the road,
wooden cages where the dizzy chickens clucked
and squawked to concentrate
their scrambled eggs into creation.
On the wooden wheels, the fathers propped

the brightly painted, dog-gnawn dolls,
their hinged knees wagging
back and forth, between the wooden spokes,
strips of leather sewn into blue and red painted burlap.
A leather pouch of wine is passed
from man to man while the women mend
the broken shoes, their faces hot, pressed into shadows

shed by cylinders of flame
when the road dries into red dust
and they camp among their drying things
while children pick at ticks collected
as they combed the brush. The widow
twists a widow's moon from the mildewed
tuneless dissonance of her fiddle,
wooden circles hinged like oyster shells
clicking rhythms, the sharp percussive
memory of looms threading its spindles.

Held by bells, the ankles of the billy-goats
cackle on the barrels. The dimming of the hillside
as white clouds hurry from the dark ones,
the twilight skies impassable
beneath blue and purple mountains
as the flock swerves up as one along the hill's face,
holding their coats against the building wind,
to stand before the silent wheat,
rain shaking toward them like the snake
hem of a curtain inching toward them

under pink sky. Flocks of curlews
swerve up as one black angled bird
above the hill's face. Beneath,
a million bones are ground to bits and humus, rich with nutrients
even as the structure of their dozen species

are flattened into one another, TV sets,
studded in the mud and flapping plastic,
the children on their hunks of candied rice gaining altitude
until their ears pop.

HELL'S ANGEL

White blossoms drifted down, punch-drunk butterflies,
collecting on his cupped palms as the brown fields dashed with wheat
moved in to swallow him, the tides of grass and cricket, firefly
and wind. The twisted spokes blackened in the fire

until the clearing sparked and white smoke created phantoms
for its molecules to drift windward in. A roebuck tucking a ferns' broad fan
with the wet black sandpaper of its snout, and at the clearing's edge
the dappled doe stands vigilant as the tank explodes.

The smacking ear-thin lips of horny-toads:
thrown down in the dogwoods with his helmet crushed into his head,
his heart wore through and came up through his mouth in pulpy chunks.

NEST

Crude tools, the ribbon lifting up
behind the cardinal, its red wings
vibrating in gray, the rain

tapping on its wings, the feathers
sharp and blurred as knives
that shatter at the falling

of the water. Wind is change,
and vacuum constancy, the buckle
of vast nothingness around

the slow rotation and circling
of a plan and near the sun, the nest
will be for agents born

crippled, blind and starving,
they had been fed by their
own atmosphere, simultaneous

is the screeching of the chicks,
the simultaneity of gravity their lesson
of the worm thrown

over the sky, the wet tufts
raking, at the bones beneath each
hatchling convinced of its own

inheritance until the weakest
drops, never to be raised again,
and the strongest takes the wind

and makes it useful, snatches
the thin, segmented animal, tosses it
up; slaps its beak shut

as it stares down to swallow it.

JOCKEY HIDING IN THE RAFTERS

The boss’s horses are a great deal similar to mine
except they’re real: he feeds them
sugar beets and straw, he stares into their great brown eyes
as if in sympathy, as if to say: yeast makes paste a hearty bread
and you are glues housed in the sinew of the martyr,
the whipped and docile angel housed in gamy meat.
His soft hands smoothing back the shampooed strands
fresh from the brush. He runs his nose beneath
the stallion’s ears: strawberry and salt,
a high-pitched stink of pig.
The ice upon the stable floor vanishing into the white light
blinding at the swinging door and six or seven, rose-sized
sparrows snatching at birdseed by the water pump. The air
between their faces brightens with their breath,
the curling braids of hot, transmuted air
dissipating in the greater atmosphere, and then
he hits the horse. He cracks its eye from which
fall the iridescent globes of tears saved
stoically, in which the convex memory of ancient hills,
the rounded mounds of granite, quartz and moss-caked bedrock
spills. In time, the great ferns ticking, ticking in the wind
and dewdrops leaping from the lowest fronds
as if seeking refuge from the violent leaves
among the yellow leaf, the maple reds
throbbing under rain like mutant butterflies
beneath a polished glass. And then,
he spits on it. My heart compacts,
folds in upon itself to see—
his soft hands—his gross, unmanly body
spilling from his belt—
world weary creatures thicker than my boy,
whose back ducks under me like rainwater
turned underneath a wheel and spit behind.

SELF-PORTRAIT OF WEST WIND WITH CHICKEN AND WINDMILLS

The cargo that I'll bring to you is gross:
the unrelenting, falling feathers of a pillow
caught in propellers, twisted in the gears, then thrown
while the fat man, grumbling into wakefulness
was pulled back into sleep with strings
of vapor, voracious gas kinder to the dying man
than gravity which will cradle him
with nothing, take him suddenly, make him matter
without sentience, much like grout
or tar with fruit juice sprinkled onto it.
The birds—forget the birds, you ass,
I'll take the earth. I'll see me blown
through seeds, through grates,
the segmented whistles of antennae
or the walkie-talkies of the beat police.
They have their whoopee parties, son,
with open windows and the thin slot
of air beneath the door resounding
with the hammering of fists. I lick
the tattered fringes of the jacket
where the denim has lost blue, and I
will come to understand, too late, perhaps,
these fish-shaped clouds are filaments
weakened to be frayed, and freaked out
Frank up there is breathing in.

CLOTH

On Martinmas, the haberdasher ducked and slid his hand
into the crevice in the wall,
groping for his daughter's hand.
The shadow of a Magdalene spread over him,
cutting him in halves: the bright side
and the shade. Above its face, obscured
by sculpted veils crackling with blue paint
December searching through each facet for the rainbow,
holding street-lamps and mailboxes hostage,
frozen solid in their work. I said, he said,
answer me, as if the wall, as if the mortar were petulant and still.
Her voice a beetle batting at a screen:
it would not break through the atoms of the wall
surrounding Jeremiah's fingers. It is just enough
to jinx the fear of nothing there, just enough
to pull the finger-bone inside its socket at the knuckle-back. Jesus, we are waiting—
waiting. Why? Why? Jeremiah's eyes—eclipse of iris—tucking his fingernails

under and into the grit and spackle of the hole.
Eliza, why? and then
falling silent. Now, by the river I have seen them
walking, heads bowed
in contemplation, deliberation, or the whispers of the pimps.
I have seen them with the laws of vanity
and service dragging at their shadows.
I have seen them broken
beneath the bridge, still finding
the grace that their master's face
had backed away from. To have been exchanged,
once more, for goods. The too-young carrion
whose lips revealed nipple to be anything for weaning.
I have been a father
in the precincts of the dam. Turpentine for dowries,
gasoline on the seeds
of primrose hybrids, the feather of a blond actress,
opiates secured in green balloons greased up
and squeezed into her bowels. Everything explodes.

What I have spared is waiting
for me in the carriage, tearing the chagrined smile
and the green eye in his boredom,
prostitutes who spurned him, the police—he's ready.
Hurriedly stuffs the blanket doused
in kerosene and lights a match against the sash.

ICE

On the roofs, the swimming pools
were frozen over, filled with swimmers,
faces like dying shrews.
Red light in electric lanterns
at the crossways blinked, lowered
into green. Papers
through the cables of the bridges,
slapped brittle wings against high windows:
cracked. A child,
girlish, dressed in rainwear, flips a penny up
from her cupped palm over the shoulders
of the black man, his black eyes
frozen open, leaps and catches it behind him.

She leans over, lets the penny
plummet from her tilting hand
to burst through the sidewalk,
pulling down the street, the storefront,
windows, and the cars, the whole
city follows, pouring into that hole,
and the fine white talcum of the shore
follows and plummets through the cracking panes
of river. The girl spinning in the air
above the crater, spinning, her pink bow
billowing and blown flat,
billowing and ripped, followed by
the yellow rubber hollow bodied angel of her gear.

PERU

The hydrants are ochre icons beneath sugar maples: alizarin
spotted in yellow, tiny holes drilled through
by worms, ash in air, dogs
straining necks in chains
rusting where the links
creak together. They squat
to squeeze out celebration.
The sun, liver-spotted,
falters, oozing at various speeds, yes,
and cormorants swooping over us
puzzled by gravity, sparks
on the tracks and the stars
with us in between. What has been left
to the light is pulled underwater,
to magma, to great flares
and finally gravity collapsing in gravity,
a universe in reverse, ravenous shadow,
the hole where the astronauts
fall to us, puffy and haunted,
snowfall to earth in an unmoving night,
revolving, symmetrical,
victims of physics,
their hands full of batteries
found baked into stones
where no human had been until now.
Who were they, winged ones
who carved churches on flatlands,
mazes of paths that were lizards and birds?
Locomotives with rust in their wheels think
electricity sounds nervous, lifts
in the wish that it made itself, we've made—
the star then, the faint
ancient shine, disrupting the hill
where the flint-napped awls
are buried, where the virus' lie,

latent in bones
of finished voyagers, in their beads
and filaments of quills,
laced in there it is
who are we now
when the light falling on us
has stopped and what curves,
just missing us,
lives on by traveling—out and away.

THE GHOSTS OF ANTARCTIC BACTERIA

We are blue fools pushed back from the beaks
of penguins by the grunts of seals,

clear and too small to be seen except by dogs
cocking their ears to the frequencies that travel

the circumference
of our beings, creating holes

in the whistle through crystals.
Fools because we cannot break

the sound in which we travel into halves,
and pull the pitches over us to drop us someplace rich

with minerals to breed. Some turn to human concerns
and travel underground

to watch neutrinos falling through the universe, a snow
dropping through matter as a knife dropped from a great height

might travel downward through a silo with feathers
if the body of those feathers could be seen

as one enormous feather, standing still—
but the knife would jam. The feathers

a million, compacted things
and without thought would not allow

the falling object through. More
like solar systems speed away from the centers of the galaxies,

and the black holes spin and blast the matter from their edges,

and all galaxies from some common center,

the sparkling of the particles in huge tanks underground
might represent, in some way, stars.

Alas, we are inept to show you how.
We don’t exist; we fool the birds

waddling to holes in ice where water
under ice is closest to pure: the universe

a palm cupping a coin-sized pool of brine,
shaken from the stiff, flipper wings of the penguins,

just as a man submerged in tepid water in a chamber without light
becomes the vacuum in between the speeding fragments of the first

monumental opening, perhaps merely the smallest
or median of such opening

is a piece of something bigger than infinity. This is man,
devoid of cloth, ornament and eye,

confusing taste with touch and touch with sound,
disorganizing thought in rapid effort to bring together

what cannot be brought together,
memory and sense, abstraction

and the tumblers clicking together in a jagged wheel,
half-deduction, half-intuition, half-dream,

three halves adhering, making him first animal, then plant,
mineral, then nothing

accepting nothing as the thing made known
and nothing part of it. This way,

we say, this way, we’ll show you…

DOGS UNDER GLASS

In the parlor, dogs are barking
under dust, a pane of glass pressing
their sagging lips and canines
in the polished hickory. Crack
of dogfight—oops, it's love, yellowing
on glossy paper. Mint

in bouquets bound
by bows of dental floss, drying
beneath the reading lamp
they hang from on the pull-string.
Tchotchkes lined like razorbacks
inside a doily's flash, lace mandala,

love the transcription of the body,
taking in the shorthand
scrawled by rags of light, luckily
the beams revealing
rather than perceived themselves,
a constant blindness

made of white light, or, worse,
the genealogical adaptation failing
to make sight at all. We
would have different heads,
we might not have plucked that sort
of structure anyway, instead

had membranes on our backs
that would perceive, exquisite tympanis,
sound as perception of the physical,
making high-pitched clicking,

being adept at complicated elocution
like the ancient bat. What fun! One

would not be scared at all to die
or to feel the palpitating absence
of the nearest heart, scant inches
from one's wings, the muted
textures of that heart within the tree house
of the spine, tied at both ends

with a sex. The grit of silent fangs
a blue thing, or the stilling blood a violet.
Heaves then, in flame, confusing
bending sound within its heat,
causing forests of dusty furniture
to pop and crackle, spit and hiss.

DREAMS OF THE SCOUT MANATEE

The mincing clicking of the crawdad's claws.
On the bottom, catfish mouth, whiskers
whisking, what else? The drowned balloon
of raccoon turning slowly, bloated in moonlight.

Stone, round stone on stone, the amber light,
the green light and the leaf, the barge
for mockingbird, its throaty song
calling for the dogwood's eager blizzard, for the gun

it cannot call to with its ricochet, its bang—
the thrum of motorboat, propeller
on the memory of skin. The scampering
of metallic edges poised to tear

the water-root, the alligator
and the silence of the underwater.
O please, just leave me here, go on without,
it says. It has to be this way. One day,

the sound of its own body tears its singing
into shreds. This we call the ocean,
and what would we call hegira for these
fat and mangled angels? Perhaps

there is no danger like a name,
an image or a high-pitched squeal,
but then, the rivers never have been

big enough, and one need not imagine

but pursue as witness how they walk.

LANDSCAPE WITH ERRATIC NUDE

Santa Claus revels in the grapes—
he bends before the West wind like the to-be punished child
and dares the wind with wind. Girdle of clementine,
of garlic bulbs, iron filings dancing, worms on dangling magnets.

Cold, his bare toes clenching at the stems, the hop
of numbing soles, drumming to stir the blood. In front,
around the stone paths to the pond the newsboy stands
clicking his jawbone in and out of joint, shaking his bag
(the sharp edges of rolled newspapers jostled on the canvas)
and sticking his tongue out at himself in the storm-door's glass.

He dreams of Marianne, the languid palace of her stutter
as she checks his staves, brushing the rubber rubbings
with her hand's edge. "See," she says, "You do it wrong,
but will you touch my nipples with your purple tongue?"
He wipes the grape-juice goatee from his chin, and taps
the tabletop with all eight fingers, jumps to work, but then—

the door swings open, and a small bald man in plaid bathrobe
blinks at him. The newsboy draws a breath, and holds it in,
his cheeks chipmunk balloons, deflated slowly through kiss lips.
"$12.50, ummmmm." The bald man drops his whip, and disappears
in the shadow of the hallway. The newsboy turns: the streets
black mirrors flickering with dust-mops of banana yellow.

A white girl, puffy purple, slides by on her bike, her back
splattered with street grit. A squirrel's tail turns a circle,
and it, alerted, looks askance, then claws, a furry gravity,
up the oaks soaked bark illogic. Wind through wolves,

that dip and toss clear beads of rain into the winter,
winter creeping through the postcards in the mailbox.

In the rows of romaine lettuce painted black against the soil,
his majesty bends his shoulders back and prods
a daddy longlegs back with quick piss, steaming from his member.
The bald man, watching the nude man fall, the full moon a pale circle
on the bright day's hem. The blackbird's descending on him then.

THE SEA IS ESMERELDA

Waves, voracious animal of glass
foraging for worms in burrowing sand,
the fingertip sized holes of horse-shoe crab tracks
disappearing in the thunder-crack
and mumbling aftermath
of surf. Along the seawall
yellow stars of porch-light winking
and still, dimming and popping off
as dawn lies along the edge of sea
and eats a lone freighter where the sun
becomes visible reverses twilight blue
rising into black to claim the day.
My mother's slippers pointing toe to toe
in the loose and shadowed hills
of sand leading to the wooden boardwalk
and rickety fence slats keeping
beachcombers from the sharp tips
of the glass. The hand
that takes the dark and calms us
with a slap at ankle, disappearing
at our feet. The natural minerals of earth
colliding with our skin, unfortunate
and knowing, the animal, the apes
with grunt and pick,
bicker, bite and know the end. The moon,
its blind side turned always
away from us, the image of our end
the hole in evening where the dark falls
into nothing, and the scant lies fly.

FUNGUS

I used to fuck a bean-bag chair
filled with shampoo, now tell me
that you’re lonely.

CROWS

Falling & the wings are free,
rippling as billows do in wind against the sea,
and the broken egg. The bird abandons flight,
and the wings release, like shadows
wriggling in minuet, like shade—

and then, and then
we come to this, the wet thing
with its baby cough, the tufts of feather.
Go be a bug, a kite, a kitten's creep
but be banished without gravity,

banished into merriment, the cup
of blue that is the dawn, that holds
both sun and moon, and pulls the earth
around. The flocks will peel purple
rainfall off, make way—

when I am done, I pulled my painter up,
his long fingers dragging nets of shadow
in the bathtub for the bubbles, for the duck.
I held him in. Squeezed him
for no reason but he's wet. The drowned
still-life of his face. Blue
orbs transforming grunt to money.

JUNGLE

The parakeets were whistling as day darkened.
Water pooling on the rocks. Miles beneath the ocean
tepid water flowing, oil, a blue petroleum

one might find in sapphires at the planet’s core.
We wished we had been birds, could feed ourselves
with song, be warned by what we ate,

could push our arms against the wind, and rise
over the tropics, leaves hiding green wings, red eyes.
Drowned, the nets they cast for spiders longer than my hand,

beetles glistening, black, bristled like coconuts and held—
ick. Here come the sweaty tigers with their shagreen tongues.
On the banks of the rivers sharks jump from the waters

and explode, their boneless hulks freed from the pressure
leaving their fins. Go to them there,
baking in reflections. I am sweet for you

here on the wing-beats of the moths. My feet
are flying fish, your eyes lakes awaiting winter.